

**NEVADA STATE WELFARE DIVISION
PUBLIC WORKSHOP ON EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING
MAY 25, 2004**

Ms. Ford opened the meeting at 1:00 p.m. She explained this meeting is being held via conference call between Carson City and Las Vegas. The meeting was duly noticed in accordance with the Open Meeting Law and staff will be discussing the general reorganization of the Eligibility & Payments Manual, Section A-800, Employment and Training.

STAFF PRESENT

Nancy K. Ford, Administrator
Gary Stagliano, Deputy Administrator, Program and Field Operations
Louise Bush, Staff Specialist
Charlotte Wortman, Chief, Employment Support Services
Lori Wilson, Program Specialist
Vicki Kemp, Program Specialist
Shannon Coubrough, Social Work Chief
Sandee Wyand, Field Services Manager
Sharon Vail, Employee Development Manager
Lori Buck, Deputy Attorney General
Amanda Aseph, Administrative Assistant
Tay Weber, Family Services Specialist
Stephen L. Jorge, Family Services Specialist
Donnna Washington, Family Services Supervisor
Barbara Stark, Social Worker Supervisor
Barbara Clark, Belrose District Office Manager
Denise Scungio, Employment & Training Supervisor
Robin Roach, Administrative Assistant

GUESTS PRESENT:

Jon Sasser, Washoe Legal Services
Carolyn Museau, Domestic Violence, SAFE House
Mark Nichols, National Association of Social Workers
Launa Hall, National Association of Social Workers
Joe Edison, Progressive Leadership Alliance of NV
Tamara Pierce, JOIN
Samantha Hill-Cruz, JOIN
Herb Hammerstaedt, Nevada Legal Services
Paula Berkley, Northern Nevada Advocates to End Domestic Violence

Carolyn Wilson, JOIN
Jackie Kearn, JOIN
Roberta Gang, Nevada Women's Lobby
Vicki Lo Sasser, Nevada Women's Lobby
Laura Bayard-de-Vok, Nevada Women's Lobby

I. Reorganization of the Eligibility and Payments Manual Section A-800, Employment and Training:

Ms. Ford explained the need for changing the current terminology in the Employment and Training Manual. The public workshop is to clarify the terminology used in the manual. No changes made, but the process has been sped up. She invited guests to discuss their issues with Employment and Training at this workshop. A Public Hearing will be held on June 18, 2004, which will have several issues on the agenda, i.e. Energy Assistance and Low Income Home Energy Assistance (LIHEA) State Plans, Child Care, and TANF issues. The Public Hearing will be video-conferenced between the Legislature Building in Carson City and Grant Sawyer Building in Las Vegas.

Ms. Ford noted the handouts explain how processes such as prior approval, after approval, and crisis intervention program statistics work. The actual redraft of the manual is also included in the handouts. The manual is available on the division's website, without the changes being discussed at this workshop.

Ms. Ford introduced Gary Stagliano, Deputy Administrator, Program and Field Operations. Mr. Stagliano discussed what the federal work participation rates are and how they impact the Welfare Division. The federal law mandates 50% of those who receive New Employees of Nevada (NEON) services must be in countable activities for 30 hours per week. The federal government has granted some latitude for this rate. The numerator in determining the work participation rate is the number of people meeting the 30-hour per week criteria. Unfortunately, the federal government is very stringent on those numbers and it is an all 30 hours or none situation. If a participant puts in 29.5 hours in one week, it is not countable and they will not meet work participation requirements. The denominator is the number of people with barriers to work in the NEON mandatory category. NEON mandatory participations are needy caretakers who apply for TANF cash and have no exemptions. Upon TANF approval, the denominator starts counting and each week counts toward the work participation rate. He also stated if the state does not meet federal work participation rates, a sanction against the TANF Block Grant is imposed.

Mr. Stagliano explained what a report of illness (ROI) is. This is a report of illness, physical restriction, or doctor's excuse that does not preclude someone from working.

The federal government was asked for special consideration for those who report an illness, and none was given.

Samantha Hill-Cruz, Carson City Job Opportunities In Nevada (JOIN) Office, stated she understood there is a limitation on the amount of countable hours for people to get a general education degree (GED). Mr. Stagliano replied there are some limitations within different categories and only certain ones can qualify for countable time. These are called core activities. Lori Wilson then explained most of the countable hours must come from core activities and then they can be supplemented with non-core activities, like education, to make up the mandatory 30 hours.

Ms. Ford explained during a 30-hour week, 20 of those hours must be spent in core activities and 10 hours in another countable activity. If the amount of core activities are not met, the participant is counted as zero. Ms. Ford noted the federal government sets the work activities and the Welfare Division does not have the discretion on how to count them. Ms. Wilson added age plays a part in work participation rates. If you are under 20, more GED hours are countable.

Jon Sasser stated there are people at various stages of getting a job. The division does not receive any benefit toward the work participation rates because the applicant has to be on cash assistance. He asked if the statistics on these applicants is being tracked to help with the work participation rates. Mr. Stagliano responded all data after approval for TANF assistance is captured and the job search becomes a countable activity. However, Ms. Wilson commented staff find many people choose not to go forward with the TANF application process.

Mr. Sasser said if some of these applicants could be counted it would be helpful and asked how many people are making an informed choice by not applying for TANF benefits or do they just get a job because they do not want to deal with the process. Denise Scungio, Employment and Training Supervisor, stated applicants are informed of their options when they attend orientation. Mr. Stagliano discussed what information is given to the clients at orientation.

Ms. Wortman explained the TANF/NEON application process, as described in the handouts. She discussed the steps completed prior to approval for TANF benefits and these procedures may not be done in the same order in each office. Screening assessments are completed, checking for self-disclosed barriers to job readiness; any physical or mental health issues; domestic violence issues; child care issues; or, transportation problems. Determinations for necessary referrals are completed during the screening assessment and TANF/NEON program information is given at that time. If the applicant is exempt from applicant job search, the exemption is identified and they are referred to a Social Worker. She explained these are just a few of the several things done prior to approval.

After approval, a work assessment determination is completed. The recipient can then discuss what barriers to employment they have, if any. Support services are provided to meet their needs and if they are still NEON mandatory, they will be assigned to a Community Work Experience Program (CWEP) site.

Ms. Wortman asked the social work staff submit the number crisis intervention activities to her for the month of March. The Social Workers saw 419 clients. Some clients had multiple issues for social workers to deal with and they are a combination of approved or pending clients for TANF.

In response to a question from Carolyn Wilson, JOIN, about the appropriateness of a work assessment, Ms. Wortman stated it is used as a pre-screening assessment tool. Ms. Wilson stated her concerns about the form are they are for self-disclosed information only and asked if eligibility workers are asking these questions of the clients. Ms. Wortman said eligibility workers, Employment and Training workers and Social Workers can all acquire this information from the client and she explained the clients can then talk to their worker about what their barriers to employment are. A Personal Responsibility Plan (PRP) is also done at the time of assessment. Ms. Wilson asked if there was a standardized document to capture this type of information. Ms. Bush stated this information is discussed when the prescreening and post assessments are done and two different types of workers have the opportunity to see what needs to be done to best serve the client. After the pre-screening and post-assessments are completed, another will worker review the findings with the client. The worker keeps digging deeper to ascertain the client's skills and abilities and provide appropriate services. Staff work as a team when assessing a client and they can disclose any barriers or hardships to these workers at any time.

Jackie Kerns, JOIN Rural Office, stated there is a CWEP in her office and she never received any information regarding the their barriers to employment. Ms. Bush recommended speaking to their worker or Employment and Training Supervisor to discuss their particular barriers. Ms. Ford explained confidentiality laws could be the reason the information has not been disclosed to her and offered to follow up on this issue for her.

Roberta Gains, Nevada Women's Lobby, asked about child care referrals completed prior to approval and if there is waiting list. Mr. Stagliano noted there is no waiting list for childcare and there has never been any waiting list for TANF recipients. She asked how long before a client is able to see a Social Worker, if the client needs to see one. Shannon Coubrough stated it depends on the case. Social Workers are on staff at the larger offices and travel to the rural offices on a regular basis. There is always a Social Worker on duty for crisis intervention and if necessary, the client can be seen immediately.

Jon Sasser, Washoe Legal Services asked if someone gets a job and are over income, is childcare available for those clients regardless how much they earn on their new job. Mr. Stagliano stated as long as the discretionary income limitations are not exceeded, they can qualify for child care assistance. Ms. Ford explained they have to be below 70% of Nevada's median income to qualify, all child care categories are being served and she listed the income guidelines for child care assistance.

Paula Berkley, Northern Nevada Advocates to End Domestic Violence, asked for clarification on CWEP orientation and activities. Ms. Wortman explained the orientation is done in a group, so the chances are less of someone asking for a referral for domestic violence. However, if a CWEP is work in a welfare office, there is more of an opportunity to observe them if there is a problem. Ms. Ford reiterated the Welfare Division did not change any procedures, the proposed changes are only to speed up the application process and help clients get a job.

Ms. Berkley stated she thought the 1½ hour interview was not conducted anymore and is relieved to hear it has not changed. She also stated she has heard when Spanish speaking clients are invited into meetings, there is no interpreter available. Ms. Wortman said if an interpreter is needed staff try to identify this immediately so an interpreter is available.

Ms. Berkley stated people who are participating in the NEON Program would benefit from a flow chart with the information that they might need regarding the expectations of the program. Mr. Stagliano stated a pre-eligibility interview is offered to all applicants and it can be done pre- or post-approval and staff has found most applicants would rather accept TANF-related Medicaid than go through the NEON Program.

Carolyn Wilson stated there seems to be groups of people who need Welfare's services to acquire the skills needed to get a job, but the requirements placed on them by the division are so heavy it seems to interfere with their training. Some clients perceive they are being made to jump through hoops when needing cash grants. She wonders if there are other agencies out there that can be worked with to help provide these services and possibly increase those participation rates.

Lori Wilson explained how the job search category works. They are currently making some changes and redefining some of the work activities.

Mr. Stagliano explained Nevada read every definition and was not able to apply any latitude to it. We are now looking at other states who have been very successful to expand the definitions.

Sharon Vail noted the Clark County Social Services started a program where they bring in different speakers to train organizations and social workers. Welfare participated in

this training session once per month and they invite different public sector and social workers to come and learn about the various programs.

Jackie Kerns explained her experience with the GED Preparation Limitations and her experience the further away from ones' education are the less successful and more time needs to be devoted to it. Their recommendation is a student who is serious about getting their GED within 3 months must attend 5 days per week 3 hours a day. Lori Wilson stated this is one of the places where the regulations are very tight and we have to live within those requirements. Ms. Wortman sees the need for the clients to achieve their GED to further their success in life.

There was no comment from the South.

Mr. Sasser wanted to clarify one thing that has changed informally is a requirement unless you are otherwise exempt, once approved you are now required to come in for a 30-hour CWEP assignment at the Welfare Division. He doesn't feel this was a requirement before. When he reads the proposal for the public hearing under Section A.813 states people may be asked to participate in this. Is this something you envision as standard operating procedure for everybody who is otherwise exempt or one of the range of options of activities that somebody might be assigned to do? Ms. Wortman clarified this point for Mr. Sasser. She stated there is a range of things people can do. There can be one-on-one evaluations, assessments and job search that are done. In some offices, the clients may go to training within that office. There are a variety of things that are happening. Jon stated it is up to the individual office/client how this is done. An office determines how it is handled and who are not exempt must come into the office for 30 hours. Ms. Ford explained the 30 hours is only to mirror the 30-hour for any countable work activity.

Carolyn Wilson thought when Mr. Stagliano performed his presentation, he said they were coming in for 30 hours of work. Those are still requirements. This is what she heard from that meeting and she wonders what the clients hear. After eligibility approval, the client comes in for orientation they sit down and talk with them and get a post approval assessment, do a Personal Responsibility Plan and they agree to cooperate, and a skills assessment. Mr. Stagliano explained how this process is done. When you have performance standards, the people do not get the level of services that they are entitled to.

Herb Hammersted attended an orientation briefly and was told individuals who are exempt in the program or have no skills will be required to come in for 30 hours in the office to work. If you can do job search, you go out and do job search and will not be required to come in. If a client worked in a profession all of his life, what type of an assessment can you get out of that? Ms. Ford stated 30 hours is all inclusive. There are job connect people in some of the big offices. It is how it is briefed to everyone

that you are expected to work 30 hours per week. If we have a hard time understanding this, how can we explain this to the clients?

The orientation Mr. Hammersted attended was a NEON group orientation. There are a lot of work requirements. Paula Berkley noted clients get overwhelmed with all of the work requirements. Mr. Stagliano stated that the orientations should be more upbeat.

Samantha Hill Cruz asked if we know the percentage of felons who are receiving TANF? Mr. Stagliano responded we only get this information through self-disclosure or if we are performing an investigation on a case.

Mr. Sasser offered a helpful suggestion. He feels we should educate the client what happens after they get a job. Lori Wilson stated that we still have to explain to the client what their consequences are.

The comment from the audience was that single moms have childcare as their biggest concern. Is any help given to these single mothers for childcare? Ms. Ford said childcare is provided and paid 100%. A referral is sent over to the childcare agency to start them immediately. Ms. Ford stated if a client states there is a problem, we would work with them. If a client shows up at orientation with children, then they are rescheduled for a different time.

Lori Wilson reviewed the changes to the Section A-800 handouts. This detailed information can be requested if needed.

Mr. Sasser had a couple of questions regarding the participation rates. Is there any ability to use ten times three equals thirty? What kind of creativity do we have in these areas? Lori Wilson explained there are some limitations. Ms. Wortman informed Mr. Sasser if he could find some area to be creative in, Welfare would look into it.

Ms. Ford reminded everyone that if anyone has any suggestions or ideas after leaving this public hearing, please send them in and we can consider them.

II. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS:

None received.

Nancy thanked everyone for attending and participating at the Employment and Training Workshop and the meeting was adjourned at 3:56 p.m.

